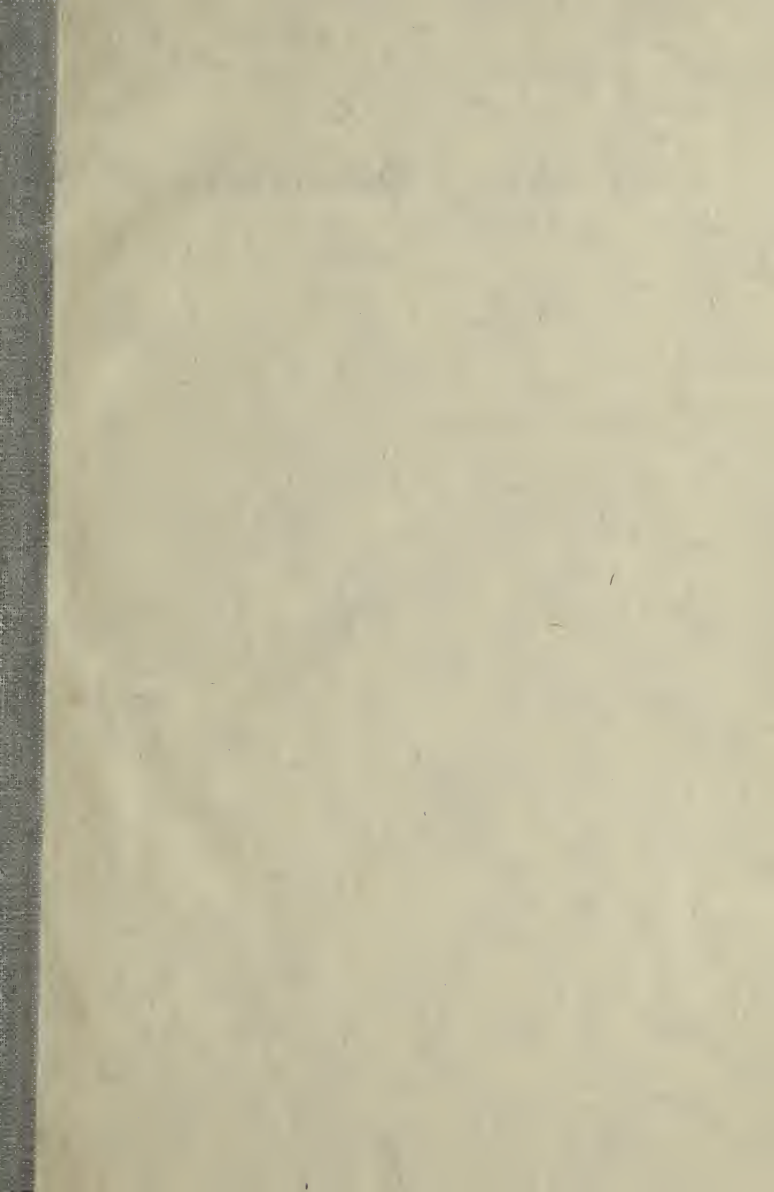


ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO

by

C. Henry Smith

MRR
289.
7772
Sm 5



One Hundred Years Ago

C. HENRY SMITH



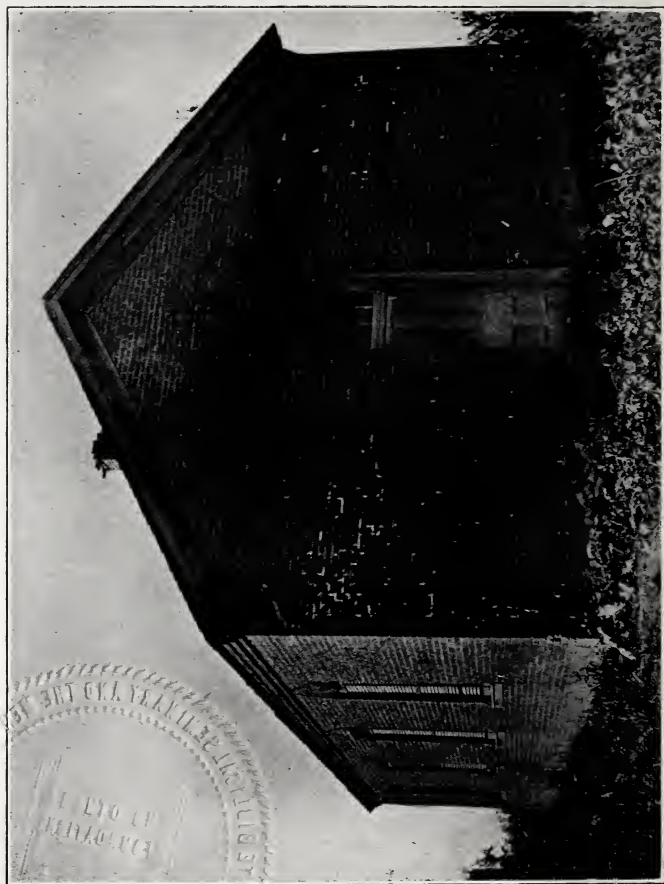
One Hundred Years Ago

*An address delivered at the first Home Coming
celebration of the Old Partridge congrega-
tion near Metamora, Illinois,
August 20, 1940*

by

C. HENRY SMITH





ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO

First of all, may I express my appreciation for the privilege of sharing with you this home coming occasion, and the privilege of looking into the faces of many friends and acquaintances of the long ago, and these fine young people, most of whom I do not recognize, but with whose parents and grandparents I am sure I am well acquainted. Home coming, the magic of that word! I suppose in all the English language there isn't another word so sweet, so reminiscent of tender memories and sacred recollections as the word home, above all our childhood home, a home that lingers now only in memory.

We have met here today to celebrate the founding of this congregation, over one hundred years ago. A church, too, has its childhood days; and I am sure it will be entirely in keeping with the spirit of the occasion if we remind ourselves of the early experiences of our forefathers in those pioneer times. You have already been told that this congregation, originally known as the Partridge congregation,—pronounced "Pätridge" by our grandfathers—was organized in 1833; but you are perhaps not all aware of the fact that this was also the first Amish congregation to be founded anywhere west of Ohio, and that it is the second oldest of any denomination in Woodford County, having been preceded by only one year by a congregation of the Disciples church near Eureka; and, likewise, that it was also perhaps the first German speaking congregation of any denomination to be established anywhere within the confines of the state of Illinois.

Our "Pätridge" forefathers in truth were real pioneers in the development of the religious life of central Illinois.

The first Amish settlers in Illinois located along the Illinois river near what was originally called Wesley City, but now East Peoria, in 1831; but organized church life was not possible until the arrival of Christian Engle, an ordained bishop in 1833. The organization of this first church no doubt took place in the home of Peter Engle, or perhaps John, both sons of Christian, who had located here along the edge of the timber belt one mile west of present Metamora, several years earlier.

There is no way of recalling the names of the charter members at this meeting. Among the Amish pioneers located in the different settlements in this region by 1833 were David Schertz, Joseph Rusche, Christian Rocke, Joseph Auer, Peter Beck, Joseph Sommer, John Sweitzer, and Peter Guth in the Wesley City colony; the Engels, Christian and his sons, the Verklers, Joseph and John, in the Metamora area; and the two Joe Belsleys (Red and Black), Christian Smith, John Kennel, and Peter Naffziger, farther west along Partridge Creek. It is not likely, however, that all these were present at this first meeting, since they lived in widely scattered settlements, and the lack of roads through the primitive forests, bridges, and means of transportation made extensive travel all but impossible. Soon after this, also, another organization was perfected for the Wesley City group.

Christian Engle served this pioneer congregation only a few years, until he died in 1836. He was succeeded by his son, Joseph, who had also been ordained in his native Alsace. The son served until 1852, when he, too, died en route to St. Louis where he had hoped to meet an immigrant friend just arrived. In the meantime other bishops, ordained in

Europe before their arrival here, joined the Partridge congregation, and shared the duties of their office with those already here—among others, John Nafziger, who arrived in 1837, and died in 1856; Andrew Bachman from 1839 to 1864; John Gingrich, arriving the same year, but called to his reward in 1845; Peter Beller, who arrived at the Partridge congregation in 1850, but later moved to Gridley where he died in 1887. Christian Esch was ordained here first as minister in 1852, and as bishop sometime later. Joseph Mourer came to the Partridge congregation as an ordained bishop in 1856, and died in 1867. Joseph Bachman, son of Andrew, was the last of the European born bishops, being ordained here in 1852, and serving until his death in 1897, to be succeeded several years later by the first of the native born bishops, Andrew Schrock, still serving.

Among the Amish, the ministry, selected by lot, was more highly revered as the Lord's anointed than would have been the case had they been chosen by the vote of the congregation without the lot; they were almost clothed with the "indelible character" granted the priesthood by the Catholics. Once a bishop always a bishop, no matter where he went. Any congregation into which he moved had to accept his services, whether agreeable or not. And so it happened that at one time, so tradition says, the Partridge congregation was blessed with four immigrant bishops, all with equal power, and thirteen ministers, but with what degree of harmony we are not told.

For twenty years the Partridge congregation worshiped in the private homes of its members; partly for economic reasons, but largely because of religious conservatism imported from Europe where the Amish still regarded meetinghouses, once forbidden by the ruling authorities, now still a

worldly innovation. The first house of worship, built of brick, was erected in the heart of the settlement at that time, 1854, about five miles west of Metamora, on the Germantown state road. This state road which was also a stage road by this time, running from Peoria by way of Germantown to Metamora, and then north in the direction of Chicago, like all stage roads, was lined every few miles with a tavern where the stage driver as well as the farmer, hauling his produce to the river market, might stop to water his horses, and not forget his own thirst. I am sure that to the older members here Hickory Point, Union House, Germantown and Sharps Corner recall many pleasant and perhaps some apologetic memories. Being on the main highway from Springfield, the capital of the state, to Chicago, the road was later frequently traveled by many of the famous men of the day. Tradition has it that Lincoln frequently stopped for refreshment on his way from the south during the ten years of his law practice at Metamora at the Peter Engle tavern, just where the Washington and Germantown roads part company west of the former county seat.

The Partridge church got its name from Black Partridge creek, the general region where most of the early members lived. In the absence of any other distinctive landmarks, in those early days, the Amish congregations were known by the various creeks which flowed through the settlements, thus Partridge, Mackinaw, Bureau, and so on. The old brick building was abandoned many years ago, when most of the members moved out on the open prairies where they erected a new meetinghouse several miles east of Metamora, some time late in the eighties. Even the site of the old church house along the Germantown road will ultimately be forgotten by the generations to come unless some one

who still remembers will soon mark the place with an appropriate tablet.

In the meantime, for about twenty years after the founding of the Partridge settlement, new immigrants from Europe continued to arrive, among others those bearing the names of Schertz, Nafziger, Garber, Bachman, Gingrich, Oesch, Sommer, and Burckey. Like their predecessors, these also, passing by the fertile though uninhabited prairies to the east, chose to establish their first homes in the forests along the creek bottoms where there was ample building material for their primitive log cabins, and where they had ready access to the river markets. Within the span of a generation, however, the children of these pioneers, realizing the future value of the rich prairie lands beyond, began one by one to leave the clay knobs of the Partridge settlement, and follow the expansion of the more industrious settlers eastward, finally forming a new congregation on the prairie some seven miles farther out, furnishing, too, most of the members later for the Roanoke congregation as well as many for Gridley, Fisher, and also some to the Amish settlements in Iowa and Nebraska.

Perhaps it might be well to remind ourselves at this point that the Partridge church was only one of a number of Amish congregations formed by European immigrants during this period in various states. The neighboring settlements along the different Illinois creeks have already been mentioned; but in addition, substantial Alsatian-Amish colonies were located in Fulton and Butler counties, Ohio; in Lewis county, New York; and Waterloo county, Ontario.

Many of these immigrants were young men and women; most of them were poor; and all of them farmers. Cheap lands in any quantity could be had

along what was then the frontier line of America, the line which divided the white man's territory from the Indian's, and running roughly at the time through central Illinois, northern Indiana, and northwestern Ohio, on through western Ontario. The old Indian chief, Black Partridge, after whom the creek was named had left his native haunts just a few years before the coming of our forefathers, and a few straggling Indians still lingered about the outskirts of the settlement for a time. The next year, it will be remembered, President Jackson ordered that all the Indians still residing east of the Mississippi should be removed to what it was thought would be the permanent Indian reservation west of the Father of Waters. The refusal of Black Hawk, in 1832, to obey this order was the cause of the Black Hawk war in Illinois that year.

The first comers to Illinois were wont to arrive on the eastern coast, at New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, or Alexandria, all of which ports still had harbor facilities sufficiently adequate to accommodate the moderately small sailing vessels of that day; then they found their way first to their Amish brethren in Lancaster county, Pennsylvania. After a stay here for a period more or less brief the immigrants, purchasing horse and wagon perhaps, loaded up such small possessions as they had, proceeded by horse and foot over the mountain passes of Pennsylvania to Pittsburgh where they transferred to a flat bottomed boat which took them down the Ohio, up the Mississippi and the Illinois to the promised land of Fort Clark, and from here up the various tributary creek bottoms. That is the route that was followed by the Engles, Belsleys, and my grandfather, and other early settlers. A little later, the relatives and acquaintances of the first comers found a more convenient all-water route by way of New Orleans, the Mississippi, and the Illinois. Aft-

er 1850 when the railroad first reached Chicago from the east a more northerly route was followed.

From the diary of a member of a party of Bavarian Mennonites, en route to Illinois in 1852, we have an interesting account of the hardships encountered along this route. Arriving at New York this party waited several days for a boat to take them up the Hudson to Albany. From here they travelled over three hundred and sixty miles along the Erie canal at the rate of four miles an hour as far as Buffalo, from whence they took a boat for Toledo. But that was a cholera year, and one member of the party, father of a small family, taken down with the disease, died along the way. After stopping long enough to bury the body along the shore, the boat continued its way. At Toledo they boarded the first and only railroad then running into Chicago, taking two days to make the journey now consuming not much more than the same number of hours. At Chicago, then already a city of some fifteen thousand, the party took time out to wait for a canal boat down the Illinois, and to give the women folks a chance to do their family washing along the shores of Lake Michigan. The route continued down the Illinois river with St. Louis as the original destination; but learning along the way that cholera was also prevalent in that city, they decided to stop off at Peoria, and find their way from there to a Mennonite settlement in southeastern Iowa rather than Summerfield, Illinois, their original objective. The widow of the cholera victim on Lake Erie, together with her small children, was the first to leave Peoria by stage for Burlington, Iowa. On the way one of her children died. Holding the dead body in her arms for half a day, she finally persuaded the driver to stop long enough along the way to construct an improvised coffin, and bury the child under a shade tree along the roadside.

Let us turn back the pages of history for a moment and see just how primitive the civilization of central Illinois was at the time our first group of Amish pioneers located their first crude log cabins, in 1831, near what is now East Peoria, but then still a howling wilderness. Illinois was still young, having been admitted to statehood only thirteen years before, with the capital still at Vandalia, a little village hardly as large as present Metamora. It was just nine years after the first log cabin had been set up on this side of the river, the only human habitation it is said, at the time between what was then Fort Clark, now Peoria, and Lake Michigan. To the east of the Engle homestead, on the edge of the timber belt, there wasn't another white or Indian habitation across several hundred miles of prairie until you reached the hardwood forests of western Indiana. Yesterday as I came through Indiana over route 24 I noticed as I came through the village of Wolcott, some fifty miles beyond the Illinois state line, the sign painted in large letters on the roof of a barn, "Here is Where the Prairie Begins." Had you made that journey from Wolcott, Indiana to Metamora, Illinois, in 1831, you would have crossed nearly two hundred miles of raw prairie without road, not a single acre under the plow, nor a single human dwelling, uninhabited save by the prairie chicken, the rattle snake, and the prairie wolf.

Chicago was then a hamlet of five houses. There wasn't a single village, nor semblance of one in what is now Woodford county; in fact there was no separate Woodford county as yet, this region still being a part of Tazewell county. Versailles, later the first county seat, Bowling Green, Fahrnisville, later known as "Slabtown," all long ago forgotten, and Hanover, now Metamora, were not yet in the making. Even the Germantown state road had not yet been laid out. There wasn't a single

schoolhouse, nor a church house within the confines of the county. It was in the era before modern friction matches were known, or kerosene lights. Farmers still harvested and threshed their grain by hand with cradle and flail, though in this very year a young man down in Virginia by the name of McCormick, was fooling around in his little country blacksmith shop with a machine that was to revolutionize the whole agricultural industry in America in the years to come.

These were stirring times nevertheless. The Black Hawk war in northern Illinois occurred in 1832; the first abolition society was formed in New England in 1833; about the same time Joseph Smith, of New York, inaugurated the Mormon movement which just a few years later ended so tragically for himself at Nauvoo, Illinois. In the early thirties, too, Abraham Lincoln was spending his formative boyhood days in Salem, Illinois, running a grocery store which he says finally "petered" out, and began the study of law which he later practised for several weeks each year during his ten year circuit in the old court house still standing in Metamora.

Where did our forefathers come from? This is another question which we must answer if we are to understand their life here. Nearly all the Amish immigrants to Illinois, as well as those to other states, during this period, came from Alsace-Lorraine. These provinces, it will be remembered, had been the battleground between the French and Germans for centuries. At this particular time they belonged to France. Linguistically, the Alsatian Amish had always remained German, however, since their emigration here from Switzerland during the latter part of the seventeenth, and the early eighteenth centuries, speaking a lingo, as do most of the native Alsations still, half way between the Swiss and south German dialects. The Lotharingian Am-

ish most of whom had drifted up into Lorraine from Alsace, in course of time brought their Alsatian dialect with them, though, being surrounded by French speaking neighbors, they acquired a number of French words in their conversation which betrayed their French environment. All were of the same original Swiss stock as their Pennsylvania Amish brethren who had preceded them to the land of promise a century earlier. Such words as "charmant" which I remember hearing my mother use in describing something especially beautiful or attractive is evidence that her ancestors came from Lorraine; while such words as "hūs" for "haus," and the diminutive "kaemmerle" for the German "Kammer" indicates a direct Swiss survival among all the Alsatians as well as the emigrants to Lorraine. All of the Amish were Swiss-Germans both biologically, and linguistically, though French, nationally.

In the course of a visit several years ago to the land of our forefathers, I found, especially in the Saar region, trails of the Schertz's, Engels, Belsleys, and many other familiar Woodford county pioneer names; but for lack of time I was unable to trace the direct connection between the European and American branches of these families.

I was especially interested in a search for the original home, farther inland in the direction of Metz, of my grandfather Christian Smith, a charter member of the Partridge congregation. Unfortunately, I knew little about his life, except the fact told me one time by Aunt Mary that my great-grandfather was a miller, and was killed accidentally in a mill in the year 1800,—the year my grandfather was born. Later I learned from a French Amishman, who had migrated to America in 1874, that in his early youth he remembered a current witticism, in his native French town, Guermagne, a

little farm village near Dieuze, and not far from Metz, attributed to a miller by the name of Smith, who in commenting on the seasonal nature of the rainfall in that area, said that when the wheat was harvested and ready for the mill there wasn't enough water to run the mill, and when there was enough water for milling there was no wheat to grind. My French informant was further of the impression that the descendants of this miller were now living near Metamora.

Equipped with these meager facts we started out one summer afternoon, my wife and I, from Metz to the railway station of Dieuze; and from the latter place took a taxi to the village of Guermagne. We arrived here late in the afternoon, but too early to meet the "maire" of the village who had not yet returned from his work in the fields. This gave us several hours for loitering about the only street of the village, and get our bearings, as well as to observe the villagers as they went about their evening chores. The farm buildings here as in every typical French village consist of some twenty or more homesteads, all built together under continuing roofs on each side of the street about one hundred feet back, having the appearance of two long shed like structures. There is no telling from the outside appearance or structure of the building which is cow stable, pigpen or human habitation, except by noticing the occupants. If perchance a cow thrusts her head out of the window that part of the shed no doubt is the cow stable; if pigs are seen coming in and out of an opening in the side wall, then by the same token that must be the section reserved for the pigs; while the human dwelling must be that part where you see little children playing about the doorway.

Land is valuable in France, and not a square foot is wasted. The fields begin right back of these

buildings; while the front yard, the long strip between the buildings and the street, is devoted to the manure pile, the pigsty, the chicken pen, the neighborhood garbage, as well as the discarded farm machinery and the village wells. Pigsty and kitchen window are often uncomfortably close together. From a safe distance of half a mile or more, and seen through the window of a swiftly passing express train, the red tile roofs of these farm villages peering through the green foliage of the trees that line the streets may present as pleasant and charming an appearance as Mark Twain says they do in one of the passages of his "Innocents Abroad"; but the great American humorist should have taken a closer view. Even a manure pile from that safe distance may seem a work of art.

It was just eventide, and men were coming in from their day's work. Farm fields are not enclosed with fences in France as they are in America; and consequently the live stock which is turned out into the open pastures or stubble fields after harvest—cows, pigs, sheep and even the geese, must be accompanied by their proper herdsman, usually a small boy too young to do a full sized man's job, or an old man too feeble to be of any use at any other task. First to come home were the cows with their herdsman, who had no difficulty in separating the different members of his herd among their proper owners as they passed down the street; for cows, like church members, who always occupy the same pews in meeting, know their own stalls without much human help. Bovine and human psychology do not differ greatly. Sheep are not quite as smart as cows, though, assisted by his faithful dog, the shepherd had no particular trouble in delivering his sheep to their proper owners for the night. Presently we heard the sound of a bugle down one end of the street. At first we thought it was a brass

band come to town; but soon a drove of hogs appeared around the corner. Hogs, as everybody knows are the most independent of all farm yard creatures. The bugler was sounding out a call for help to all the claimants of his drove to pick out their own particular animal.

By this time the "maire" had arrived from his work in the fields; and with his assistance I discovered from the town records that a certain miller by the name of Smith had once lived in the village, but whether he was of my line or not I did not know. I am quite sure of one thing, however, that if my grandfather did not live in this particular village, he lived in one near by, and exactly like it, without much change during the past hundred years. Reflecting upon the possible effect upon my own destiny had my grandfather decided to remain in his native land, I could not help being eternally grateful for the good judgment, the courage, or the poverty, or whatever it was that drove him to exchange the limited opportunities and the hopeless outlook of his own native French village for the boundless blessings of American religious and civil freedom, and the fair promises tied up in the vast expanse of the virgin prairies and woodlands of central Illinois.

We speak of ourselves today as Mennonites; but you will recall that our forefathers were of the Amish branch of the church. Perhaps it might be of interest to know why they were Amish, and how they got that way. That fact was determined for them several hundred years before when a young and conservative Mennonite preacher, by the name of Jacob Amman, whether a native of Alsace or Switzerland is not quite certain, who in 1693, appeared among the Swiss Mennonite congregations demanding the observance of an old practice called "meidung," which had been a source of much controversy among the Mennonites along the Lower Rhine

ever since the days of Menno himself, but not in use among the Mennonites of Switzerland and their descendants at this time.

This practice, based on a mistaken interpretation of the Pauline injunction "not to eat" with a church member when expelled from membership, demanded, according to Amman's interpretation, a complete ostracism by his former fellow members in all social and business relations as well as religious affiliation; and further required its unconditional application to all family connections if necessary, husband, wife, parents and children. For some reason Amman's movement did not take well in Switzerland, though, on the other hand, the whole Alsatian church went Amish.

In course of time the Amman following developed a spirit of extreme conservatism and exclusiveness which protested every slightest change in religious or social practise as the times changed—a sort of Chinese worship of the past which by crystallizing old religious beliefs and social customs projected them far into the future, years and sometimes centuries beyond the time they had been discarded by the surrounding folks in general. And so, hooks and eyes, once a common custom among all common people, were retained long after they had been replaced by buttons by the world in general; and beards after shaving had become common. Of course the Amish people were not alone in this fear of adopting the new. Other distinctive religious people shared this spirit with them. The Quakers, Dunkards, Methodists and Baptists, as well as the Mennonites, to a smaller degree perhaps—all were slow to follow the world in general in its changing styles of living. Beards were universally worn by the common man in Switzerland at the time of Jacob Amman; shaving was general in England in the days of George Fox. And for that reason the Quak-

ers forbade the wearing of beards, while the Amish demanded it. The Quakers' testimony against beards, and the Amishman's predilection for them, both rest on the same religious basis,—the fear of worldliness. The Amish seldom introduced anything new into their religious or social practice after the death of Jacob Amman. Such religious and social peculiarities as characterized them afterwards are merely survivals of customs and practices once common to all the people of that class.

All these distinctive Amish traditions were brought to America by our forefathers, to which were added others of specific American origin later as the times moved on and left the Amish behind.

Up to about the middle of the past century all the Amish groups in America, Alsations as well as the earlier Pennsylvanians in various states, were of one faith and practice; and though not constituting one ecclesiastical body, readily fellowshipped with one another. But soon after this time, because they were widely scattered and independently governed, slight differences, engendered by the free air of America, began to appear among them—differences that seem inconsequential to us today, but serious to them at the time.

These controversies seemed to crop out among them simultaneously almost in various parts of the country—in Pennsylvania, and Ohio, as well as in Illinois. The widest rift developed between the more recent Alsatian immigrants and the older Pennsylvanians. From a tract written in 1862 by a member of the Holmes County, Ohio conservative Amish group,—all Pennsylvanians, we learn that the Wayne County church was already showing signs of departure from some of the old traditions. Says this troubled Amishman, in lamenting the worldly tendencies among his Wayne County brethren—

“Es wurde nicht fuer gut oder notwendig angesehen dasz die Diener in dem Abrath gehen. Und es wurde zu zeiten Rat gehalten bei offnen Thueren in der Gegen wart von auswaertigen Personen. Die alten dicke Liederbuecher wurden verworfen und die neuen Springwiesen eingefuehrt. Auch die Gebet Buecher brauchten Sie nicht mehr. Ban und Meidung wurden selten geuebt. Hochmut, Pracht, und Uebermut nahm ueberhand. Es heisz es kommt nicht auf des aueserliche an, wenn nur ihr Herz gut ist. Die Haueser wurden praechtig ausgeziert. Alles das und noch viel mehr von solcher art entstand durch den obengemeldeten J. Yoder und seinen Anhang.”

The “Abrath” spoken of in this complaint was the little council room found in every Amish meeting-house of the time, used for various purposes, but principally as a consultation chamber where the numerous ministers would gather together each Sunday morning before the services to decide such disciplinary church matters as needed attention; and especially to agree among themselves as to who among them should preach the sermon for the day, who to lead in prayer, who to open the services, and to distribute such other duties as the occasion might require. In the Partridge church this council room consisted of a small annex built on to the rear of the main building, and reverently referred to as the “kaemmerle.”

The “dicke Liederbuch” was the old Ausbund, consisting of martyr hymns originally gathered together and sung among the Swiss Mennonites as early as 1527, adopted by the Amish as their sole hymnal, and carried with them wherever they went into Alsace, and America; still used today by the Old Order Amish without a single change of even

the three century old quaint Swiss dialect, sung "einstimmig" to melodies as old as the hills, and unknown anywhere else to the outside world—the oldest hymnbook undoubtedly still in use today by any Christian church in America. Copies of the "dicke Liederbuch" were brought to Illinois by the early Amish immigrants, but it was not in use evidently very long here; at least I have not found many copies of it as heirlooms among the children's children of the early settlers. It was superseded in course of time by a smaller book, partly an abridgment of the old hymnal, first printed in Pennsylvania, called "Eine Unpartheische Lieder Sammlung" which remained the accepted compendium of church songs until well toward the close of the century. More than one part singing was forbidden for more than half a century, but in course of time new melodies were introduced, and better singing encouraged. I am sure many of the older members here still remember such favorites as "Oh Got wir loben Dich," and "Jesu, Jesu, Brunn des Lebens," the latter being a favorite of my father's.

These old hymns would not rank high in poetical merit according to our modern standards; neither would the singing of them by our pioneer choristers win a prize in an eisteddfod contest. But they were sung with reverence and sincerity. To the average unsophisticated music lover the charm of a song lay not so much in the technique of the performance as in the pleasant associations it recalls. To me, some of the fondest boyhood recollections of the old Partridge meetinghouse are the memories of the strains of some of these familiar old hymns floating out to us through the open windows as we were gathered together in the horse sheds enjoying a breathing spell during the long sermons and listening to the gossip of our elders, and the whinnying of the horses as they called back and forth to

each other along the row of hitching racks on many a pleasant Sunday forenoon of the long ago.

The discarding of the "Gebetbuch" was also a sign of a new order of things. The early prayer book from which the minister was wont to read his prayers was no doubt a real necessity and a great blessing to the unlettered preacher who usually would have found it extremely difficult to compose an extemporaneous prayer. Even after the prayer book had been discarded most prayers remained memorized versions from different portions of the old prayer book. I remember a story frequently told by old deacon Wagler of the Roanoke church, who as deacon was occasionally called upon to give his testimony after the sermon in his congregation, or to offer prayer, always from the prayer book. Realizing his own limitations as a preacher, and commenting in his later days upon the passing of the prayer book, he enjoyed telling the story of the old time preacher, who, like himself, was wont to lean heavily on this source of his devotions in his worship service. Being in a special hurry one Sunday morning the old preacher forgot the precious book, and did not discover his loss until he reached into his pocket for it just as he arose to open the service. Considerably embarrassed by his dilemma, but realizing the necessity of going ahead with the worship, he pulled himself together with the consolation, "Yetzt misse mir uns uf der Herr verlosse."

"Meidung," too, was on the way out by the last half of the century. The "Hochmut" and "Pracht" with which the Holmes County Amish charged their Wayne County brethren consisted of buttons, window curtains, carpets, painted barns, top buggies, and other growing signs of worldliness.

These changes which were taking place among the Amish of Wayne County were typical of sim-

ilar trends in Partridge and other Illinois congregations.

For the purpose of reconciling these growing differences among the various congregations throughout the country, a series of general conferences were arranged which met annually for sixteen years, between 1862 and 1878, in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and several in Illinois, the last one in 1878, meeting in the Roanoke church. Among the eastern congregations, where meetinghouses were not yet in vogue, or too small to accommodate the large crowds that attended the sessions, the meetings were held in capacious farm barns. A list of the Illinois ministers present at this last session at Roanoke may recall a number of familiar names to some of you. From Woodford County and immediate surrounding communities were present—Jacob Rediger, Joseph Wagner, Joseph Rediger, Christian Schrak, Joseph Bachman, Christian Oesch, Christian Schertz, Christian Rupp, Christian Risser, and Jacob Zehr.

The objectives of this series of conferences, however, were not realized. Instead of reconciling the growing differences among the various groups, the only result was the final crystallization of the Amish people in different parts of the country into three separate divisions. The congregation near Danvers, Illinois, presided over by elder Joseph Stucky, more liberal than the others, forsook the conference even before the annual sessions closed; and following an independent course, became the mother church of what for a time was called the "Stucky" following, but now known as the Central Conference of Mennonites. On the other hand, such congregations as opposed all change, mostly easterners,—buttons, rejection of meidung, shaving, new household conveniences and modern farm machinery, Sunday schools, evening meetings,—hold-

ing fast to all the old traditions to the last ditch, fossilized into what is known today as the Old Order Amish wing of the church, nearly entirely of Pennsylvania stock.

Between these two extremes remained a third group, nearly all Alsatians, which though still conservative and slow to depart from old and tried beliefs and practices, yet were not so completely wedded to the outward forms as to refuse such changes in religious and social practices as made for spiritual progress. These took a middle course, and came to be known finally as Amish-Mennonites. The Partridge congregation became a leading member of this group. In the late nineties all these congregations in Illinois, and several western states, formed a separate conference; but later affiliated with the older Mennonites, joining the conference of the latter, thus losing their earlier distinctive Amish character and name; and so after a separate existence of more than two centuries are again today known merely as Mennonites.

Most of these later changes have taken place within the span of my own lifetime. I retain a distinct boyhood recollection of the annual visits made to our home by an old couple from the eastern end of the county, and their great concern at the passing of the good old customs. Two words frequently repeated in the old man's conversation made an indelible impression on my mind,—“Meidung,” and “Tracht.”

The “meidung” had already been discarded before my day, but hooks and eyes were just passing for the laymen, though not for the ministers until near the close of the century, but not all at once. First laymen were permitted to dispose of them from their everyday clothes, and then finally from their church clothes, except on very special and sacred occasions, such as baptism, communion, or marriage. I

still have a faint recollection of hearing my older brother, Joe, say one time, though I have never asked him since to corroborate it, that on the occasion of his baptism he was required to appear buttonless for the rite, a request which he satisfied by cutting off the buttons from his coat, for which he substituted pins for the day, to be replaced by the usual buttons again the following Sunday. Before the close of the century buttons were in good standing for all occasions.

Of course, these accommodations to changing conditions were not always negotiated without a casualty now and then. There is a tradition among the older folks that back in the fifties a certain member of the Schertz clan, choosing to remain in Peoria to engage in a private business venture rather than to follow his relatives out to the country settlements, and thereby accumulating certain city airs not practised by his country brethren, was rather arbitrarily put out of meeting one Sunday morning, not for having taken up the saloon business, but for having acquired the forbidden custom of parting his hair, and having indulged in the luxury of wearing a "boiled" shirt.

The German language was retained by our forefathers in religious worship until well into the twentieth century—long after it had ceased to be the medium of social intercourse. Everywhere and in every age man has been loath to change his mother tongue. The French Canadians as well as the Pennsylvania Germans have retained the speech of their immigrant forefathers to this day over a stretch of time of more than two hundred years; while the Alsatians in France, under French domination for most of the time, have retained their German for nearly half a millennium. The church is always the last institution to reconcile itself to any language change; and that is not surprising. Each language

develops its own distinctive spiritual atmosphere. Social traditions, and religious sentiments once given expression in a given mother tongue in early life, can never be satisfactorily transferred later through another language medium. Here is an extract from the Pennsylvania German poem "Hemweh," which can be appreciated only by a bona fide Pennsylvania German, and which must lose much of its effective heart appeal if turned into any other language. The poem tells the story of a man returning to visit his childhood home after years of absence. Everything in the meantime has changed. His parents are dead, and the old homestead is now owned by strangers. The visitor visualizes it as he remembers it from his childhood days. As he approaches the place on the hill, first the tree tops come in sight, then the house itself and the outbuildings, and finally the familiar sights about the yard, the corner of the porch where he remembers seeing his mother weeping as she bids him good-by the first time he left home; the other corner of the porch where, later, his father used to sit in his arm chair facing the church cemetery where his mother lay buried. The visitor finds himself at the door of the old homestead debating with himself whether to enter or not.

Ich wees net, soll ich nei' in's Haus,
Ich zitter an d'r Dheer
Es is wol alles voll inleid,
Und doch is alles leer!
'Sis net meh heem, wie's eemol war,
Un kann's ah nimme sei;
Was naus mit unsere Eltere geht
Kummt ewig nimme nei,
Die Friede hot der Dodt geaernt,
Das Trauerdheel is mei.

I am sure that to those of you who learned your Alsatian German at your mother's knee, and per-

haps scarcely knew any other through childhood, and who for the better part of your life never heard any other in religious service, to you, the same parental affection here expressed could not be transferred as effectively through any other language medium. I am not speaking to the younger generation, of course, who may never have known the Alsatian dialect or German. The following English translation of this stanza by the same poet finds little response in the heart of the genuine Pennsylvania Dutchman,

All, all is still, I hesitate—
I fain would pass the door,
But fear the pain of missing all
This home contained of yore.
For, ah, it is not what it was
Though its inmates are kind;
What with our parents once we lose
We nevermore shall find;
Death goes before and reaps the sheaves:
We can but glean behind.

To be sure it was inevitable and right that the language of worship should follow that of social intercourse, and that of official national usage. What may have been a sentimental loss to certain individuals of the older generation in the shifting period, became a distinct gain to the younger generation, and thus to the future church as a whole.

Even before the passing of the German language, the later generations also outgrew other inherited institutions now regarded as more or less questionable by well meaning people, but as perfectly respectable in the early days. Our grandfathers were no prohibitionists. In their day both the whiskey bottle and the pipe occupied a place of honor on the refreshment table when visitors came. My father, I believe, was the first of the ministers among the

Illinois Amish to openly denounce from the pulpit the evils of the saloon, frequently to be criticized by some of his fellow ministers for so doing, and admonished to stick to the gospel instead of preaching about such questions as drinking and the use of tobacco.

Our Old Order brethren, who had parted company with the American Alsatian Amish in 1878, and who have since then withstood with flintlike tenacity every encroachment upon their old traditions and practices, have not always shown a fine discrimination between the good and the bad in their religious development. The other day while passing through Ligonier, Indiana, the center of a large Old Order Amish settlement, I witnessed what seemed to me a strange sight—an Old Amishman, with long hair, a flowing beard, with hooks and eyes, coming out of a modern drinking parlor, smoking a cigaret.

Our European cousins also have likewise shown a similar lack of differentiation between what we here regard as socially acceptable and prohibitive. Although they have radically departed from some of the fundamentals of the faith of the fathers, yet they have retained some of the older social practices which to us here seem now decidedly undesirable. While in Europe several years ago, during a week-end stopover in Strasburg, my wife and I decided to pay a visit over Sunday to one of the Amish churches near by. From the German Mennonite yearbook we learned that the nearest congregation was located in the city of Colmar, in Alsace. Writing to the minister in charge, we received a letter a few days later inviting us to visit his congregation, and stating that he would be at the railway station to meet us on the following Sunday morning. I knew very little about the Alsatian Amish at the time. But surmising that perhaps they might still have retained all the conservatism of their fathers

in the matter of dress and social practices, and might perhaps still wear beards and hooks and eyes, I suggested to my wife that we dress as modestly as possible for the occasion, so as not to unnecessarily offend the brethren.

Arriving at the station at the appointed time on Sunday, we looked about for our host, but saw no one who quite fitted our conception of an Amishman. Just as the train pulled out and the platform had been cleared of passengers we saw a dapper young Frenchman, with a well trimmed mustache, wearing a silk hat, approaching us from a fine new automobile parked at the end of the station platform, seemingly also looking in vain for a man with a beard. Since he was the only one left at the station, I ventured to ask him whether perchance he was the minister of the Amish church. Receiving an affirmative reply we entered his automobile and drove to the church.

We later learned that our host, the minister, a Reverend Wack, was a prosperous businessman as well as an Amish preacher, the superintendent of a large textile mill in the city; and that he had formerly been a member of a sect well known in Illinois as New Amish. During the services that day they also ordained another minister, an intelligent young man, the chief government forester of the Colmar area. After the services Reverend Wack invited us to his home for dinner, together with several other visiting brethren from Switzerland, who had come up that day to be present at the ordination exercises of the new minister. I recall but little of the conversation, or the dishes on the table at that particular dinner, except that before each plate there were three drinking glasses, one fairly good sized, filled with a red liquid which I readily recognized as the usual red wine; another, somewhat smaller, filled with what evidently was champagne;

and a third, very small, containing a liquid as clear as water. Asking my dinner neighbor to the left, the Reverend Goldsmith from Basle, what the contents of the little glass were, seemingly surprised he replied, "Wissen Sie nicht was das ist; das is Schnapps, guter Schnapps." I presume it was, I didn't test it out.

This of course was a city church. The Alsatian Amish churches in the country, no doubt, are both more conservative in their church practices, and less blessed with cultured ministerial leadership; but all of them, city or country, have departed very far from the faith of the fathers especially in the matter of nonresistance, though on the other hand they have retained ancient social habits which their American cousins have discarded as unchristian.

Not much provision was made by the early church for her young people, though here, too, the Partridge congregation usually led the other Illinois congregations in any progressive movement. Sunday schools were introduced in the early eighties, first in the schoolhouses, then later in the church buildings; young people's meetings followed in the middle nineties. Considerable credit should be given here for the awakening of interest in young people's work to several wide-awake and intelligent young preachers from Indiana, who occasionally visited the Illinois churches during this period, among others J. S. Coffman, and D. D. Miller.

In these later years the most significant of the new policies of the church has been the changed attitude toward what we call higher education. The men and women of the first two generations had meager educational facilities—a few months a year for a limited number of years in the primitive log cabin schoolhouses where they learned to read, write, and especially to spell, and do a little figuring; and with that their educational career was end-

ed. Even the preachers, chosen by lot, had no further preparation for their task. I see before me in the audience three of my cousins and boyhood companions, Ben Schertz, John Camp, and Christ Imhoff. These three and myself as young boys, about fifty years ago, were the first boys from this congregation ever to attend the local high school. And so far as I know we were the first from any of the Amish communities throughout the whole of central Illinois. We had few successors in our own generation. Today all the boys and girls practically go to high school, and many continue to college. From this congregation have gone out in recent years many teachers, high school principals, several college professors; a number of missionaries, and into other lines of religious service. This splendid music we have just listened to by these fine young people, and this whole home-coming program would have been impossible even twenty-five years ago; and is ample testimony of what these educational opportunities have done for the church.

After all, progress in any field of human effort is pretty largely the result of wise leadership. Whether we like it or not, we must admit that the great majority of us are merely followers, not leaders; and that the world will not miss us much after we are gone, nor would have suffered much had we never been. In fact, in all those things that make for progress, the great majority is usually likely to be wrong. It was in the days of Columbus, who was regarded as a crazy man by his fellow townsmen; the majority was wrong in the days of Martin Luther, and Menno Simons; and in the days of Jesus. The majority was often wrong in the Partridge church in bygone days. It was when the first Amishman had the courage to ride to church in a top buggy; and when the first young man protested the wearing of a beard. The majority was wrong when

it first opposed the introduction of the Sunday school, and evening meetings, and the use of the English language in the pulpit. These progressive innovations have been made possible only through wise, and farseeing, and persistent leadership.

Mennonite modesty prevented our forefathers from boasting of their own virtues, or writing their own autobiographies. And so we have few records of the achievements of the first two generations. I must therefore confine myself here, in mentioning a few of these leaders, to those whose work fell within the period spanning my own lifetime. Among others, I recall Christ Camp, lover and promoter of good church music; Peter Sommer, the first minister at the time of his ordination to protest vigorously against the regulation that ministers must wear hooks and eyes; my own father, Bishop John Smith, the first to speak from the pulpit against the evils of strong drink, promoter of Sunday schools, and the first to use the English language in worship service, and friend of young people in general; Peter D. Schertz, John Schertz, Peter Garber, favorable to all progressive movements; as well as numerous other younger men and women still living who have taken a leading part in every religious and social movement that made for the welfare of the church.

So far in this address I have confined myself largely to a discussion of the changes in social customs and religious practices which the church found it necessary to accept in order to keep in step with the general progress of the times. But while customs and practices may change, there are certain fundamental principles which never do. There are certain human virtues, certain spiritual values, certain universal laws which are as eternal as the hills. To the credit of the Partridge congregation as well as to the American Mennonite body as a whole, be

it said that in the essentials of Mennonitism they have kept the faith through the centuries.

What are these essentials of traditional Mennonitism? I presume I need not tell you that the Mennonite faith grew out of the Reformation, and that Menno Simons was a contemporary of Martin Luther and of John Calvin. The Reformation brought in a number of greatly needed religious innovations; but it did not go far enough. All the major Protestant parties retained one of the fundamental evils of the old system—namely the union of state and church, with compulsory membership maintained by force, often at the point of death. Neither the Protestants nor the Catholics at this time recognized the rights of individual conscience. The Mennonites alone insisted that the reform movement go the whole way, back to the New Testament, and restore the church upon the Apostolic model, accepting the Sermon on the Mount as the program of social action: demanding a voluntary church, with membership based on adult baptism upon confession of faith; dedicated to the proposition that all men are brothers and born equal, with its inevitable and logical sequence—ecclesiastical congregationalism, and political democracy; convinced that only good will and love, instead of force and controversy, can solve our social ills, domestic and international; believing wholeheartedly in the sacredness of human life, and the dignity of the human soul as God's supreme effort in creation, and consequently regarding it as sinful to take human life for any purpose whatsoever, not only as a result of passion in a private quarrel, but in a judicial execution by court order as well, or by collective action in warfare upon the request of government; holding that while government is an institution divinely ordained, yet one must obey God rather than man when obedience to government would violate the will of God; and

finally that true religion is more than a set of beliefs and ceremonies, but that it must bear fruit in righteous living—honesty, sobriety, generosity, purity of life, and the other Christian virtues.

Religious toleration and civil liberty, democracy and the cause of peace were new doctrines four hundred years ago; and it took centuries of bitter struggle and martyrdom on the part of thousands of heroic souls before even the holding of these views was generally tolerated. By the opening of the present century it seemed for a time that all of these worthy social goals were in a fair way of being realized. The world was almost safe for democracy; peace conferences and arbitration treaties seemed on the verge of ushering in a new technique for the settlement of international quarrels. Then came the World War, and the troubled times since, which has turned us back once more toward the dark ages from whence we came with political and social ideals more vicious by far than those we had discarded ages ago. At no time for centuries has religious toleration, and the very existence of religious faith itself, to say nothing of democracy and peace been so challenged and threatened throughout a large part of the world as today. Before the war we were sure that the days of the martyrs for conscience' sake were past; today the horizon is dark ahead. And it is not at all certain but that the true followers of Christ may again have to face the tests of discipleship as did our forefathers. God grant that this test may never come to us here; but if it does may God also grant us the same sublime courage and sustaining faith to meet the test so eminently shown by them.

AG 13'75

MAY 17 1968

MRR
289.7772
Sm5

3421

3421

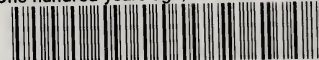
MRR
289.7772 Smith
Sm5

One Hundred Years

Ago

DATE	ISSUED TO
4/20/78	578
AG 13'75	
MAY 17 1957	

MRR
289.7772 Sm5
Smith, C. Henry, 187
One hundred years ago; an addr
c.1
00
0401



3 9304 00042905 1
ASSOCIATED MENNONITE BIBLICAL SEMINAR

